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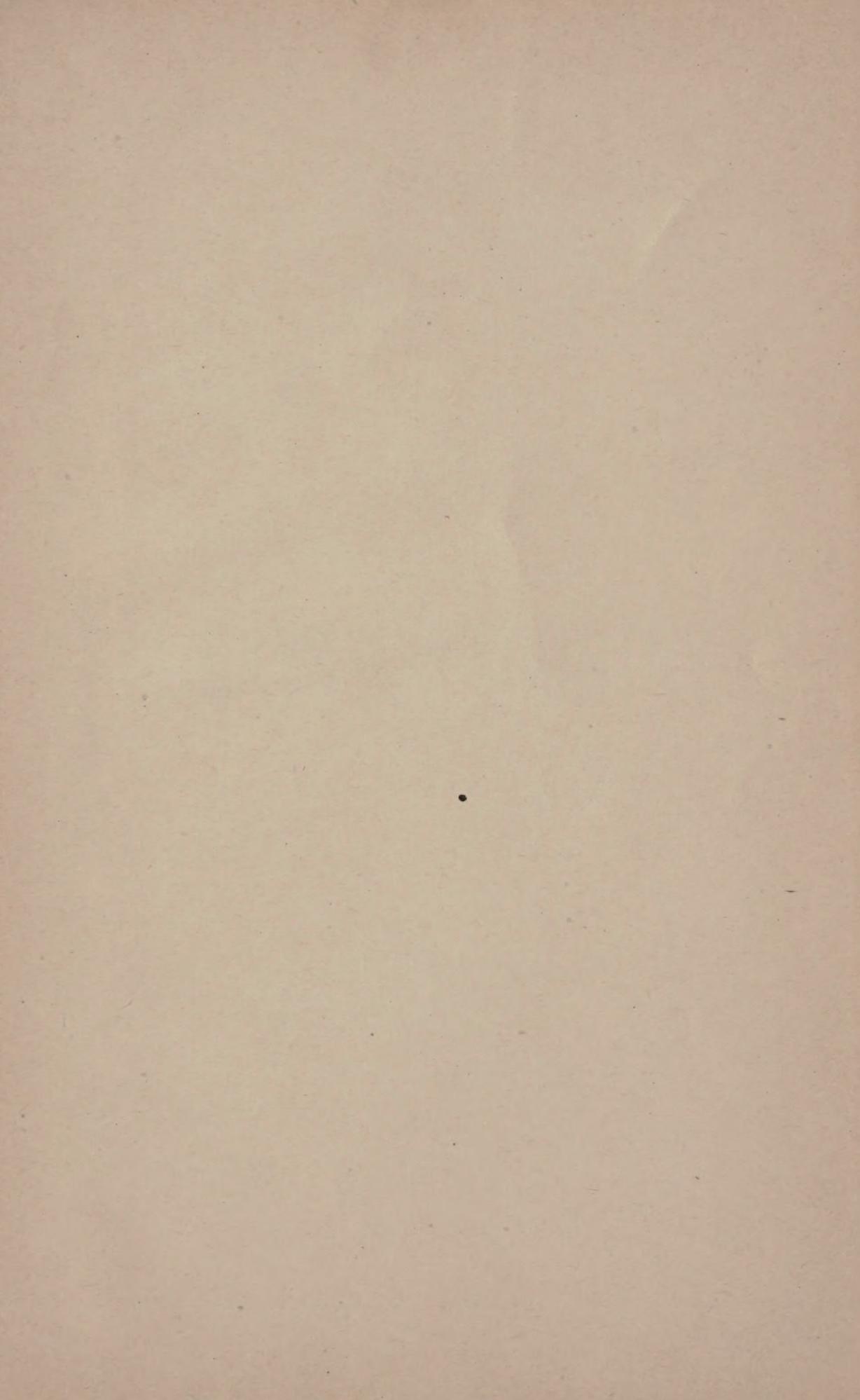
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HOLIDAYS COUNTRY.



HOLIDAYS

IN THE COUNTRY;

OR,

Tessie, Beth, Rob, and Will.

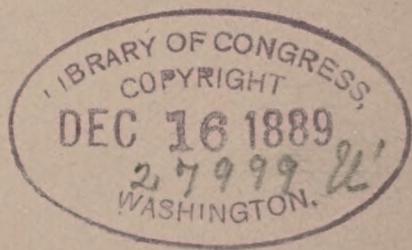


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BY IRENE.



*Miss Irene
Barbee*



SUNDAY-SCHOOL DEPARTMENT.

PUBLISHING HOUSE OF THE M. E. CHURCH, SOUTH.

J. D. BARBEE, AGENT, NASHVILLE, TENN.

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❖Preface.❖



“I LOVE God and all little children.” With this idea well in mind, the writer has endeavored to tell the little folks of America of four bright children—Tessie, Beth, Rob, and Will—who in their own sweet way may amuse and instruct other children. For all of them she has a boundless love, and deems any effort to interest or entertain them seed sown on rich soil that may help the dear little human buds to blossom into lovelier flowers.

THE AUTHOR.

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Holidays in the Country.

CHAPTER I.

A Drive Through Fairyland.

A LITTLE weather-beaten carriage drawn by two rugged ponies, which trotted gayly along after the fashion of well-fed country ponies who know they are going home: the driver quiet and reserved, sitting stolidly still, his one aim in existence to be whipping flies off the off pony; and four merry, laughing, roguish little folks on their way to spend vacation in the country.

It was a lovely country road, shaded on both sides by tall green trees, over

which were frequently entwined great wild-grape or muscadine vines, hung with large, purple clusters of rich, luscious fruit that made your mouth fairly water to behold. Now and then a saucy squirrel would peep its tiny head round a tree, then scamper away, dislodging the overripe fruit from its hold and causing the birds to flutter cheerily.

Often the carriage splashed through clear creeks of running water, where the ponies stopped to drink and look with round-eyed wonder at the rich cane and grasses growing near.

To the four little folks, Willie and Rob, Tessie and Beth, just out of school, this road was one of fairyland. Once before they had traveled the same road, when they went home with Uncle Samuel last summer. Now they were

going there again to spend the summer vacation.

Will and Rob were Uncle Samuel's own nephews, Tessie was Aunt Mary's niece, and dear little Beth was the friend of Tessie, whom Aunt Mary had invited both as a companion for Tessie and because there were so many more little ones in the family that she thought it would be a relief to the mother to have her go. This was the party who were rattling so noisily over the country road.

The driver would not humor them as Uncle Sam had done last summer when he carried them over the same road, stopping for them to gather a great cluster of dewberries, again for a lovely flower or a cluster of shining red berries, then again for them all to listen close up to the big rock near the

creek, covered all over with lovely green moss and bright curly ferns, and called the “Fairy’s Bower”—here the water bubbled and rippled over the mossy stones, making weird music, which it was said in the fairy story told them by Aunt Mary would lull children to enchantment if they listened to it until they fell asleep.

No, this driver drove straight on, not seeing the many wonderful sights which the weary little ones saw, nor hearing the sweet music in the woods which they heard. To him it was a rough road over stumps and cuts—a long, useless drive; and the time thus spent might have been better employed hoeing corn or cotton. “What a pack of rubbish those children will be when they get there!” he mentally exclaimed as he plodded along in his selfish, hard

way, never thinking how much pleasanter life would be if every one made the most of the present and enjoyed the future by making the best of to-day.

Tessie was watching the trees, fruits, and flowers which she saw everywhere. Will was looking straight at her glowing cheeks and bright eyes, while Rob and Beth were prattling merrily of the many nice things in store for them when they should reach Aunt Mary's. Ah, how often we put from us the enjoyment of the present to live in the anticipation of the future!

“Isn’t that too lovely!” cried Tessie, standing up and snatching at a cluster of scarlet flowers which overhung the roadway. But the flowers fell out, and Tessie came near following them.

Will gallantly jumped out and rescued the flowers, but had to run like every thing to get in again; yet this was only fun for them all, and away they went—four as happy children as ever spent a holiday in the country.



CHAPTER II.

Uncle Sam's Practical Joke.

“**N**OW, I say, Will,” said Rob, some two or three days after their arrival, “those girls are the most outdoing pieces I ever saw. We can’t keep any thing nor do any thing, can’t hide any thing nor have any fun, but they’re up to it. Who would ever have thought that two little curly-headed girls would make so much difference, anyway? Last week, when they weren’t here, we could do something: we might have our nuts anywhere, play what we pleased, and talk in almost any way when Aunt Mary wasn’t round. Now it’s different—can’t even go to the table without a lot of prinking, unless Uncle Sam will say: ‘Heigho! Rob, you

forgot the girls, didn't you?' Wish they'd let you forget 'em; but they don't, goodness knows. Wonder how in ten thousand nations, they ever managed to get those walnuts off that well-shed, anyway; they couldn't a clum the post.'" Here Rob drew a long breath and looked around.

Will stood looking first toward the ground, then at the empty space where the nuts had been, on the top of a rather high shed that was built over a well from which stock were watered. Four tall posts supported this shed, and the boys, who had taken a ladder to climb up there, could not see how those little girls managed to get the nuts down; but they were beginning to find that what a girl lacked in strength she usually made up in something else. They had left a large lot

of nuts here, and the girls evidently had them—there was no other explanation.

“Can’t see how they did it,” said Will slowly. Here two curly heads popped up from a large trough in the corner, and two voices mingled in laughter.

“Can’t see how we did it?” cried Tessie, taking up a long stick and punching vigorously on the under side of the shed. “That’s how.”

“Well, I never!” cried Rob with a look of disgust. “Girls are too tryin’ for any thing.”

“Why don’t you compromise?” asked Beth.

“How?” inquired Will.

“Why, take us with you after nuts and things; play fair, and let us share the profits.”

“You’d soon eat the profits up,” with a long look at where the nuts had been.

“See here,” said Tessie, looking into the long trough. Sure enough, there were all the nuts, and various other things which the boys had missed from time to time, after thinking them surely hidden from the little girls.

“Well, that’s all that can be done,” said Rob; “when a little girl tries she can be just as hard to manage as a woman.”

“Yes, and sometimes a girl can manage boys just as easily as a woman can,” whispered Tessie slyly to Beth.

So after that they were all good friends, and had a pleasant time altogether. Aunt Mary was most kind and indulgent, and Uncle Sam never

wearied of them, nor failed to have some new treat in store for them when they came home after a long ramble into the leafy woods for flowers, grapes, persimmons, or sweet-gum. He was always ready to tell them a wonderful story of ghost or goblin, never failing to make a good moral, until meditative Tessie fell to guessing from the first how the story would end and what the moral would be. To-day they are all picking blackberries in an old overgrown field, and talking incessantly.

“I wish I was rich,” says Rob; “I’d have me a great big house full of children and dogs, and I’d just have more fun.”

“Would you have any girls?” asked Beth, laughing.

“Two,” says Rob, with a mouth full of berries.

“I wouldn’t care to be rich,” says Tessie; “those are happiest who are not rich. You can have what you want just as well without being rich. I found that out when I read Miss Alcott’s ‘Little Women.’”

“I don’t know,” says Beth slowly; “I have thought I’d love to have a great many dolls, but we have so many girls at our house, you know.”

“Yes, that’s just it,” says Tessie, who is the only child; “I have heaps and heaps of dolls, but I never care for them. I always thought I’d be happier if I had somebody to play with —some little sisters, like you have Beth.”

“One always wants what they have not got,” begins Will, then cries out: “O! O! What’s that?”

Just here they heard such a noise

and tearing behind the bushes that they all stood still a moment, then with one bound they rushed wildly down the little pathway toward the house. How they ran, not daring to look back! All the stories of bears, panthers, and wildcats which they had ever heard coming into their minds—all wondering how they would ever take time to cross the old log which served as a foot-bridge over a little stream, and must be crossed steadily. They were sorely frightened—their eyes wild with fear, their breath coming quick and fast, every nerve strained to its last tension—when they heard the most musical sound they will perhaps ever hear: it was the sound of hearty laughter behind them. Then they knew that it was one of Uncle Sam's practical jokes, of which they were often

the victims. They turned at once, catching him, pounding and kissing him, and calling him a great horrid man to frighten poor little children that way. But Uncle Sam could no more live without his fun than they could without getting into mischief; and as he had so often forgiven them for some misdemeanor, so they now forgave him, and all went happily home together, to relate to Aunt Mary their adventure.



CHAPTER III.

A Little Girl Lost and Found.

ONE morning at breakfast Aunt Mary told the children that Uncle Sam was going to cut a bee-tree, and they might accompany him if they wished.

Here was joy! A trip anywhere with Uncle Sam was a treat at any time, but doubly so to-day, when they were all wondering what they would do with themselves.

“What is a bee-tree, Aunt Mary?” asked Beth.

“Well, my little town-girl,” says auntie, smiling, “it is when the bees swarm from their hives, which they often do, and fly away into the woods and go into an old hollow tree to make their honey. Often Uncle Samuel’s

bees do this, and it takes weeks to find them, even if some one else does not find them first; if they do, however, the finder has them. When they find them, they do as we will do to-day—take a hive and bring them home."

After breakfast the four children, with Aunt Mary, Uncle Sam, and Jim the hired-man, all got into the wagon and went bowling over the beautiful country-road again. Summer was changing into autumn now, and the green leaves were fast turning into red, yellow, crimson, and purple. All the gorgeous hues of the rainbow were represented—as though nature had imprisoned the sunshine and painted the leaves in wild extravagance, with no reference to time or economy.

At last the bee-tree was reached, and practical Rob and Beth busied

themselves picking great basketfuls of brown nuts, just bursting from their hulls; while sober Will, who was seeing his first bee-tree, sat upon the ground and watched Uncle Sam and Jim as they made the chips fly from each side of the big tree; and Aunt Mary was busily spreading the savory lunch on a soft, mossy knoll, which seemed just made for the purpose. The great slices of home-made bread and yellow butter, the cold ham, chicken, and vegetables, interspersed with pickles and pies, needed only the rich honey that they expected to find in the tree to make a dinner fit for a king. Aunt Mary's hobby was something nice to eat.

But where, all this time, was the romantic little Tessie? She had wandered away into the beautiful wood, picking here and there a bunch of

bright red or yellow leaves, listening to the voices of nature, thinking of the fairies, and wondering what of all the good things she would wish for if she should meet a dear little fairy dressed in green and gold, like the big butterfly that she saw a moment ago.

“I know, I know!” she cried, clasping her slim hands; “I’d ask for a dear baby-brother for a Christmas gift. See that great, darling old sunflower ’way over there under that pretty maple-tree, just determined he won’t let the frost get him: I’ll go over there and kiss him for his pluck.”

Thus on she went from flower to flower, tree to tree, until she suddenly remembered that she was very hungry, and O so weary! She must rest just a little while anyway before she turned back. She drank some water from a

little stream near by and sat down to rest, and must have fallen asleep; for the bee-tree was cut down, the dinner eaten, and all were ready to return home, yet Tessie had not returned. She had been taking lessons from Uncle Samuel, and more than once had hidden herself, just for fun and to play a joke; and on this occasion they thought she had done the same, so they sat down and enjoyed their dinners, thinking every moment that the little girl would rush out from behind some tree or shrub. But she did not.

Now the shadows were growing long. Beth was badly frightened, and so was Aunt Mary. Uncle Sam, however, laughed and tried to appear unconcerned, though he looked very grave as he told Jim to take the others home in the wagon and bring two horses and

come back, unless he met him with Tessie before he got back. Then Uncle Sam disappeared in the woods, and the others started for home with heavy hearts; but before they reached there the clouds began to gather, and soon the rain fell in torrents, the lightning flashed, and thunders crashed with a deafening roar. Then Aunt Mary, who was walking the floor, with tight-drawn lips and a sad heart, knew that Cypress Creek—the treacherous stream on which they lived—would rise; that if the rains continued all the bottom-lands where they had spent the day would be overflowed. She thought of the wild beasts that would be driven from their haunts by the back-water, and tears of anguish relieved her aching heart. Beth wept constantly, and Will and Rob were almost wild.

At last the night-shadows began to deepen around the sad watchers, the rain still fell thick and fast, when Beth looked through the window and saw Uncle Sam coming to the house with Tessie upon his shoulders, the rain dripping from them both. They were soon warmed and fed and comforted and sent to bed; but Tessie was not well for some time afterward. She took cold and fever.

Then it was that the true natures of her little friends asserted themselves. Beth would not leave Tessie, but sat constantly beside her, doing every thing she wished so sweetly and patiently; and Rob declared she was "a trump," and wondered why he ever thought girls tiresome. Will scoured the woods for new beauties to bring her, to drive away the lonely hours,

and succeeded so well that Aunt Mary declared there was nothing left for her to do but make the broth; and this she did so well that on the twelfth day Tessie was able to join them in the long sitting-room, where they had fire every evening. Here they sat telling stories of adventure and camp-life—for Uncle Sam had been to war; or of fairies and goblins; or, sweetest of all, those nice, long Bible-stories that Aunt Mary told them. Sometimes they roasted and ate nuts, popped corn, or ate apples, often all together; and on rare occasions Uncle Sam brought them all a mug of sweet cider to drink by this cheerful autumn fire.

I am sure those little children will never forget Uncle Sam, nor dear Aunt Mary, nor the pleasant days spent at that model farm-house.

CHAPTER IV.

One Purely Good Day.

THE summer was waning, and the holidays were drawing to a close; indeed, the little folks must have been home already but for Tessie's sickness, which had detained them.

Aunt Mary had promised them one good day, as they called it, and this was now in course of preparation. Swings were hoisted, the croquet-grounds made ready, and all the little folks for miles around were coming to the picnic. Such rejoicings as there were on this remarkable morning, when four heads popped up, and black eyes and blue looked out on a clear, sunny day! How happy everybody was! How good of the sun to shine!

“Wonder why the sun does not shine every picnic, Tessie?” said Beth as they were busy dressing.

“Don’t know; s’pect it’s to make ’em good and be sorry they did wrong,” said Tessie, who had been learning moral lessons since her illness.

“That would not make ’em good. Why, s’pose the sun did not shine to-day, and it was raining—would you be good? No, nor me, nor Rob, nor Will,” said Beth conclusively, as she dipped her happy little face into a bowl of cool water.

“Well, auntie says that sickness and disappointment are the fruits of disobedience, and are sent to make us remember to do right,” said Tessie, tying the bow of bright ribbon on her pretty hair and looking at the little face reflected before her where the

colors and dimples were fast coming back.

“O!” said Beth, “disappointments? Well, I’m so glad this is a pretty day; so glad, so glad!” And she danced wildly round the room, her white skirts and blue ribbons making a pretty picture.

The noise brought Will and Rob rushing in. They had been up quite a little while, and were waiting eagerly for their playfellows.

Soon after, the children began to arrive, accompanied by their parents —for in the country it is customary, when the little ones are invited to spend a holiday, for the older people to go quilting and log-rolling; so while the women sat round Aunt Mary’s wonderful quilt and talked and gossiped of their past, present, and future, think-

ing meantime of the sumptuous dinner sure to follow, Uncle Samuel and the men all went into the fields, rolled up the big logs and burned them, or sat down and told stories of camp-life and bachelor days, while they drank the cool sweet cider that they found hid under the green bushes.

And the little folks, how they did play and race and swing and scream! For Aunt Mary was determined that they should have a good time. If any nervous mother started up to stop their fun, auntie was ever ready with something nice to quiet her down; and so the little ones, protected by her, were unhampered, and never was a day spent more happily.

Out to the apple-orchard, back to the swing; down by the barn, where the nuts lay thick on the ground; up

in the hay-loft, where there were six of the liveliest little kittens in the world—to see and hear and eat, eat good things all day long. Aunt Mary believed that children could eat very much more, and not have enough, than could some mothers who had been troubled with rearing many of them; so for one day at least they were most intensely happy.

O the joys of childhood—the bright, unalloyed, happy days, when no fear of the future, no shadow of the past, flits in to mar the present!



CHAPTER V.

The Little Gypsy Boy.

“TESSIE, Tessie, do look at that ragged boy peeping through the fence—did you ever see such a creature?” said Beth, catching Tessie and drawing her close up to the fence.

“Who are you, little boy?” asked Tessie.

“None o’ your business!” said the boy shortly. “You shut up!”

“See here, ragamuffin, I’ll teach you to talk that way to Miss Tessie!” cried Will, running up just in time to hear the boy’s remark; and, jumping over the fence, he rolled up his sleeves and advanced threateningly toward him. But the boy showed no fear; he too struck an aggressive attitude, and

the other boys began to run up, calling, "A fight! a fight!"

"For shame, Will! If you hit that poor boy, I'm done with you forever. Roll down your sleeves this minute, and tell him you are sorry!" cried Tessie, coming up to them from the gate.

"Whatever is the matter with you, little boy?" she asked, going up to him and looking kindly into his dirty face. "Why, he has the nicest kind of eyes," she went on. "Say, boy, what is your name, and where do you live?"

"Name's Jack; live nowhere; runaway," said the boy brokenly, looking straight at Tessie.

"From your mamma?" asked Tessie.

"No, got none; gypsies," said Jack.

“Goodness! did they steal you?”

“What’s steal?” asked Jack, looking around and causing all the little folks to laugh. This so frightened him that he started to run away, and he ran right into the arms of Uncle Samuel, who was coming for a romp with the little ones before dinner.

They couldn’t learn much from what Jack had to tell, except the fact that he had lived with the gypsies; they beat him, and he ran away, and was very hungry, and had had no dinner to-day, yesterday, and some more times. Uncle Sam took him into the house, and when he came out, with his pretty yellow curls all brushed, his face clean, and his blue eyes shining, all dressed in one of Will’s last year suits which had been hanging in the wardrobe for more than a year, the children could

not see any trace of the little ragamuffin.

It was a week before the gypsies were heard from, and then they were well out of the country, and nothing more was learned of little Jack for years, but he had a happy home with Aunt Mary and Uncle Sam.

For the remainder of the day the children were happy; they played every thing they knew or could invent, and at last they decided to play they were gypsies and steal all the little children they could find.

“Like me?” asked Jack.

“Yes; were you stolen?” said Will.

“What’s stolen?”

“To take you away without asking. Who let you go with the gypsies?”

“Don’t know; nobody, I guess,” said Jack.

“Well, you didn’t pick up much sense in their company anyway, it seems,” said Will, laughing.

Jack blushed, but threw a tuft of grass square into Will’s face, as he said hotly: “Take that, big bully!”

“O Jack, Jack, for shame!” cried Tessie, coming up. “What will Uncle Sam say?”

“I don’t care what he says!” cried Jack, his face flushed, his eyes sparkling, his sense of injury deadening every other feeling. “I won’t be bullied by the great bear: to make fun of me, indeed! I’ll—I’ll—”

“O my boy!” and again Uncle Sam appears just in time to see the angry little fellow as he is trying to think of something indignant enough for him to do. “Come with me, Jack;” and Uncle Sam takes him away, but returns after

a short while and tells Will that it was very rude of him to talk as he did “to the little fellow who was a stranger to them all, and his own adopted boy.”

“You have grieved Uncle Sam very much, Will. I thought better of you than this.”

Will is sobbing bitterly now, for he dearly loves his uncle, and is sorry to offend him; so he goes eagerly with him to apologize to the little gypsy boy.

Impulsive Jack, who has known no discipline and has been governed in all things by his own feelings, has already repented and is quite anxious to make up and get back to play: so the first lesson is learned and peace restored, and the day ended at last in one general romp and hurrah; and Aunt Mary said, in the language of

the immortal “Aunt Jo, of Plumfield:” “Dear little souls! do let them have one day in which they can howl and clatter and frolic, to their hearts’ content. A holiday isn’t a holiday without plenty of freedom and fun; and they shall have full swing at least this once.”



CHAPTER VI.

Tessie's New Home Joy.

TESSIE was at home again; and it was almost Christmas, when Santa Claus, with his merry bells and merrier hearts, would be here. But the greatest joy of all was that Tessie found a baby-brother when she came home. The sweetest, dimpled, darling little bald-headed fellow in the world—a month old, mamma said; but Aunt Mary had not told her, because she was ill when she first heard it, and then she thought it would make her impatient to go home; so it was kept as a surprise for her.

Tessie was never done loving the baby and wondering at the dimples and laughing blue eyes, so different

from her own black, sparkling ones. She was perfectly happy now, and had filled a large box with all her dolls and marked them for Beth. Dear little Beth, she wanted dolls; she should have them; she should be as happy as Tessie was, with the greatest wish of her life realized. The dear little baby filled her life too full to hold any more. How she loved to see him in his bath as he cooed and kicked and laughed! When Christmas came and passed and New-year was here, the little fellow would be five months old. And how he grew! Everybody said he was the largest, brightest boy they ever saw. Tessie was sure he would be large enough to go to school in the spring, and her little head was full of wonder as to what he would like most to have Santa Claus bring him.

School would soon be out for Christmas holidays, and Tessie had to recite a piece on the last Friday; so little Edward was set up in the buggy as the audience, while the little miss stood upon a trunk for a rostrum, and the recitation was practiced every evening while mamma was busy. Never was an audience so appreciative as this little blue-eyed boy, his large eyes fixed on Tessie's face, a happy smile on his baby lips and shining in his eyes, as eight-years-old Tessie recited to him. When the end was reached, and the grand bow made, little sister would jump from the trunk, sink her curly head on his little bosom, and O what a laugh they would have! But never till that bow was made would baby move his eyes from her face or allow his attention to be called from her.

Tessie declared he heard every word of it, and knew just where the end was.

He was a happy boy, and seemed only made to be loved. He just grew and grew and grew, was a joy to his mamma, a pride to his papa, and the world in all to little Tessie, who never before had had any thing to love that could love her back again, she said. She had a pretty kitten, and had always before seemed very fond of her cats.

“Mamma, I do not love this kitten like I always used to love my cats. Why is it? It’s as pretty and smart as they were,” she said one day.

“It’s because you love your little brother so much better than you could love the kitties that you do not realize how much they failed to fill your heart before. Brother is such a sweet little fellow, and loves you so, no wonder

you love him," replied mamma, kissing them both.

"What do you think Santa Claus will bring him, mamma?"

"Something he will like, my dear. What do you think he will bring you?" asks mamma.

"O so long as I have baby, I am happy, happy!" she answered, snatching him up and running round and round.

Ah! if the dearest love and fondest hopes could keep all the sweet little ones in this world, how few would ever leave this life for a place in the bosom of Jesus!



CHAPTER VII.

Pleasure in Store for Beth.

BETH had gone home too. Her home was not one of the greatest plenty, and there were six little girls there with herself. Her mother, however, was a gentle, patient woman, who devoted her whole life to her children and made their lives as bright as possible. They inherited her gentle, yielding nature, and thus by her own virtues the little woman's trials were lightened. Their father, who was a minister, had very little time to devote to them. In fact, his time was so fully taken up with his work that their management devolved upon the mother alone. She accepted it meekly as an assurance of God's love. Thus Beth, who

had two sisters older than herself and three younger, had not the choice place in the family by any means. If it was any thing nice to wear, it must be for Lula or May, because they were the oldest; if any thing to eat, it was for the others, because they were the least and youngest. Beth came in for all of the made-over dresses and the refused apples or candies, as the case might be; and as for dolls, only such as the older girls wouldn't have or the younger ones couldn't destroy were left for little Beth. Yet she had a sweet disposition, and dearly loved her younger sisters and admired her older ones—doing every thing she could in her self-forgetting, gentle way to oblige or humor them, and taking the little good that came in her way serenely and gladly, paying no heed to the bad.

She at all times acted in that quiet way common to those beings who extract good from every thing.

Beth was in her mother's room one morning amusing little Daisy, while Lula and May were swinging in the hall and Tiny and Dot were making mud-pies in the yard.

Mrs. March was reading a letter which seemed to please her very much. Presently she said: "Beth, I have a letter from Mrs. Lee, Tessie's mother. She sends me fifty dollars, which she thinks is due your father for his work there last year. This is only her delicate way of putting it, I am sure. The Lees were always helpful and earnest advocates of your papa. However, that was not what I wished to tell you. She wants 'her little favorite Beth,' she says, 'to come and spend

the holidays with Tessie. She can think of nothing which she knows will please Tessie so much as a visit from you, dear.' God bless my little girl, and always keep her good and lovable!" said Mrs. March, drawing her child to her bosom. "Would you like to go, love?"

"Yes, so much, if you think Lula and May will help you all you need when I'm gone."

"Never fear, my dear little helper. Mother shall miss you, but she will know that you are happy, and will be content."

"Thank you, mamma. I'd like so much to see dear Tessie again."

"Then mamma must begin to get you ready, for we haven't many days to do it in," said her mother, thinking that for once at least she must get

Beth a new outfit and draw the line somewhere else. “Dear little Beth, her greatest comfort!”

So Beth had a pretty new costume of gray and scarlet, which so well became her that she looked more like a Little Red Ridinghood than ever; and she felt so happy that her eyes appeared like two stars twinkling, her cheeks like twin roses, and her dear little mouth like the sweetest rose-bud you ever saw; so, as her papa said, “It did not need the dress after all, because she was too sweet without it.” But mammas and little girls all know how much a new dress helps to make bright eyes and happy hearts.



CHAPTER VIII.

Preparing for Another Trip.

“I SAY, Rob, here’s news for you: Uncle Sam and Aunt Mary and Jack are going up to the Lees’ to spend Christmas, and are coming by after us to accompany them. Hip, hip, hurrah!” And Will’s cap went high in the air, while he turned a double somersault, stood on his head a moment, then landed on his feet again. “Isn’t that good, though?”

“The somersault, or the news?” asks Rob lazily.

“O dear, don’t you care to go there?” returns Will.

“Certainly I do; but when?” says Rob.

“Soon as our new suits are here, and

every thing got ready. O dear, what a pack of rubbish it is for a lot of women to get any thing ready! We're good enough as it is. Who wants to be rigged up like a new doll anyway, I'd like to know?" says Will, sitting down on the damp ground and throwing his feet over Towzer's head, which made the dog bark lustily and fall upon him for a wrestle; so over and over they go, with no thought or care for mamma's injunction "to be good and keep clean." "Bill Arp" truly says: "If it was not for boys, dogs would have a hard time in this world."

Rob stood by dancing and whistling, and thinking if after all he should not decline to go; for he was very bashful, and did not know Mr. and Mrs. Lee very well, while Tessie either liked or seemed to like Will better than him-

self, and little Beth would not be there to help him out as she was at Aunt Mary's. So he wondered what to do; then he resolved to ask his mother—that wonderful help and comfort who never failed him, but always knew just what to tell him.

Mother, who was very practical and wished her son to wear off his timidity, said that as Mrs. Lee had invited them she would most likely expect them to come; that it was only a small return that he could make her by going and behaving himself as well as he could, not forgetting to do all in his power for the entertainment and goodwill of his hostess—putting it in such a light that Rob felt it his duty to go; and in his earnest way he thought it wrong to shirk a duty, so he resolved to be as brave as he could and make

the most of it. But in his heart he wished Mrs. Lee had not invited him to her Christmas-tree at all.

The days soon flew past, and the old coach rattled up to take the boys on their holiday trip: the good-bys were said, and the last admonition given, and away they went.

Enjoy your lives now, sweet little men and women. Sow good seed in your bright lives while the heart is free and pure; hang bright pictures on its walls, that looking back you may enjoy them again and again.



CHAPTER IX.

A Visit from Santa Claus.

CHRISTMAS-EVE in the house of the Lees: a large room full of life and brightness; a huge wood-fire burning in the old-fashioned fire-place—a veritable yule-log glowing, sparkling, crackling, making the very crickets silent for joy, chasing every shadow into light, and proclaiming good-will to all men.

Behind the long snowy curtains, all wreathed in green leaves and red berries, was the most wonderful Christmas-tree you ever saw—just ready to pop into full view as soon as the curtain was drawn aside.

Aunt Mary, with her happy, plump face full of good humor and love for

everybody, sat near Mr. Lee, who was telling her something very interesting. Mrs. Lee, Uncle Sam, and Jack were watching Tessie and little fat baby Edward, who were rolling over the carpet in one of their favorite plays, when Will and Rob entered — Will very eagerly, Rob hesitatingly and bashfully. This was their first introduction to the Lees, for all had contrived to keep their arrival from Tessie till the last.

“O joy! joy!” she cried, now catching sight of the boys. “O Will, dear Will, come here and see this little baby-brother! Did you ever see any thing so sweet?” And she dragged him over to the laughing child.

Rob was left alone, but Uncle Sam drew him over near himself, and they were all soon very comfortable again.

Now the curtain was drawn back; and what a beautiful tree! I can never tell you how it looked, with its green and red trimmings all interspersed with every thing wonderful and pretty. But what puzzled the little folks most was a big bundle done up in scarlet with gilt letters, "For Tessie," very plainly written. All eyes were fixed upon it; and Santa Claus, thinking they would take no interest in the other presents till this was opened, took it very tenderly in his arms and set it upon the floor, drew the red cloth from it, and—what did they see?

"Beth!" they shouted in a breath.
"However did you get there?"

"Santa Claus brought me in his sleigh, perhaps," she said, laughing, and hugging Tessie.

Will kissed her with a resounding

smack, and no embarrassment whatever; but Rob, who was so very glad he could not know what to do, stood shyly by and made no sign that he knew she was there, except to smile at her very sweetly as she greeted Jack, and to wish that he was a little fellow like Edward, that he too might be hugged and kissed. Indeed, I am not sure but he would have consented to be a girl for a little while for the same privilege.

At last the presents were all distributed, and every one had just what he had wished for. When Uncle Sam had shown them the wishing-stone, which he declared he had found in the “witch’s dell,” and told them to wish three times out loud for what they wanted Santa Claus to bring them and it would come to pass, he wrote all of

their wishes down, and they were just right.

Little Edward was asleep now, and mamma had taken him upstairs—something she always did herself, for her dearest love and brightest hopes were in that little dimpled baby-boy.

Will and Tessie were looking at the new sled and skates, and wishing that it would fairly snow in the morning, while Jack was constantly taking one more blow into his wonderful tin horn and eating candy, when they said, “Hush!”

Rob and Beth were sitting behind the tree, in something of a shadow, looking over and admiring the pretty dolls all dressed in their best clothes.

“Thirteen in all,” says Beth. “How awfully good of Tessie to give them to me! Do you know, Rob, that I

always thought I'd be just perfectly happy if I had plenty of dolls? I will give Lula and May the two largest ones, and some of the others to Tiny and Dot," she said, looking admiringly at a flaxen-haired beauty.

But we may as well say here that her mother did not allow her to give any to Tiny and Dot, but told her to keep them as her own and be perfectly happy with them.

"And I know what would make me perfectly happy," says Rob, blushing hotly and slipping an arm around her.

Beth looked at him most kindly: "What is it Rob?"

"For you to kiss me too!" he said simply.

Beth placed her two arms around his neck and kissed him softly twice; then they went on admiring the dolls;

but Rob was not perfectly happy, because he was so surprised that he forgot to kiss her back.

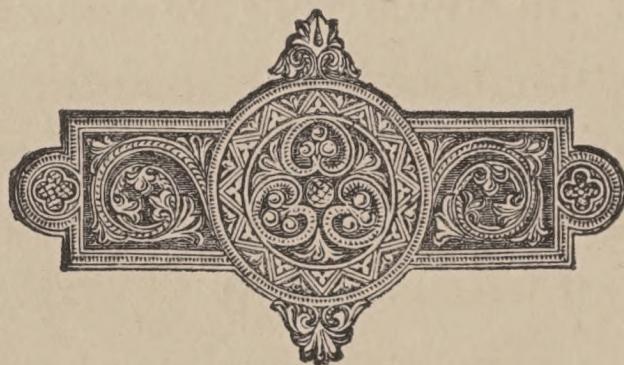
'Twas ever thus. From childhood's hour
I've seen my fondest hopes decay.

There was never such a Christmas-tree before. So thought each of the children there, and so thought many more little ones whom Mr. and Mrs. Lee, assisted by Uncle Samuel, had made glad and happy by timely gifts and loving sympathy.

“Why, Jack, did you get a doll too?” says Tessie, as he came up holding a large Turk with a bandana upon its head.

“Yes, but that’s nothing; see here.” And he draws forth a purse full of marbles, the one thing of which he never had enough, and could never keep after he got them.

Jack had grown and thrived at Uncle Sam's and Aunt Mary's, and entwined himself about their lonely hearts until they thought they could not live without him.



CHAPTER X.

A Shadow in the Home.

NOW it is spring again. June, with her roses and sunshine, has replaced the glowing fire and white snows of winter. The afternoon sun shines with a golden glory; the roses and honeysuckles nodding in at the window fill the room with fragrance and beauty; the mocking-bird on the bough just above pours forth his richest melody. The sad cadence seems to fill the ears of all listeners, as if to make them forever afterward associate his song with sorrow and death.

The horses in the lane stand solemn and still, as though they too understood human woe and offered their quiet sympathy. There is a hush and

sadness upon every thing, for dear little Edward is dead. The little household angel, beloved and idolized by every one—the dear little child who had never known the want of care and love, who had never felt one breath of neglect—has flown away from his fond parents and loving little sister to that brighter land where Jesus is, where his golden wings will expand, his little mind develop into a finer intelligence than it could ever have done here. But they do not think of this now, those who are left behind him here; they only realize that he is gone, never more to return—that their brightest hopes in life are blighted; that to them the world is dark and full of sorrow.

Little Tessie stands beside the coffin, looking for the last time on that beautiful face with its dimples not yet hid-

den, the sweet baby smile so natural and fair. The look of suffering and horror on her gentle face tells how this has crushed her loving heart, and that it is her first look on the face of death. The mother, kneeling beside her, has her heart too full of grief and blasted hopes to try to comfort the little child whom God has left her. The mocking-bird still sings, the sun shines with the same yellow glory, the little dog rubs with gentleness against the feet of his mistress, but she takes no heed of all these. The men come in, place the cover on the casket, the cruel screws are driven down, and the light of dear little Edward's bright baby-face is shut out from this world for evermore.

It seems to mother and daughter that for them life will be a blank for-

ever—an empty existence which they can never endure. At present they have no thought of consolation—only an emptiness in their hearts which they cannot bear to think of, and can in no manner forget. Turn wherever they will, there is wanting the babe's sweet presence, which they cannot understand nor fathom, and can only pray God to pity and help them.



CHAPTER XI.

After Five Years.

FIVE years have passed since we first met the characters of our little story. Tessie is now a slim, pretty girl of thirteen years, with a suspicion of sadness in her shadowy eyes, but the same bright Tessie of old. She is rocking in a hammock caressing a large, handsome cat, whom she dearly loves now. Standing beside her is the boisterous Will of other days. He has grown taller and handsomer than of old; his curly yellow hair is smoother, his eyes brighter, and his blushes more frequent. He doesn't seem so confident as he once did that any girl would love to kiss him; he has learned from experience. He is saying: "Do you re-

member the afternoon that we were picking berries, Tessie, when Uncle Sam frightened us so?"

"I do," says Beth, running up taller and sweeter than ever; "and what we were talking of too when the noise came."

"What was it?" asked Rob, stalking up, with his hands thrust into his pockets, his eyes dancing mischievously.

"Why, Tessie said she wouldn't care to be rich, and you said if you were you'd fill a house full of boys and dogs, and put two little girls in there and torture them to death. Wasn't that it, Tessie?" said Beth, laughing.

"That's right about Tess, but I deny the charge," said Robert, who had been to hear some politicians speak. "Now, what did you say, Miss Beth?"

“O! I remember now,” said Will; “she said that if she had plenty of dolls she would be perfectly happy. Wasn’t that it?”

Robert blushed red as a rose here, and Beth said: “Yes, I said that; and I’m sorry I did, for it caused Tessie to give me all of hers, and they were very beautiful too; but somehow please don’t feel hurt, Tessie. I was never so happy with them as I thought I would be. They didn’t altogether fill my heart. I always felt lonesome like, to be with Tessie herself, when I saw them.”

“What did Will say? O yes, I know now. He said: ‘That’s just it; one always wants what he hasn’t got.’”

“What do you want now, Will, that you haven’t got?” asked Tessie, turning her bright face on him.

“I want you to get out of this hammock, turn that tiresome cat loose, and come for a game of croquet. The sun is nearly down, and Rob and I must go soon.”

“Very well, sir. Good-by, kitty; be comfortable till I return. Come, Beth and Rob, let’s have a good game with partners—Rob and I against you and Will,” called Tessie leaping lightly to the ground and running away. “Heigho! here’s Jack, with a basket of red apples. Take your choice, and come on. Jack, you may swing in the hammock with Tom and eat apples till we return, if you like. You dear little yellow-headed lump of fat, kiss me now and go.”

Jack, who loved Tessie dearly, threw his fat arms around her neck and kissed her affectionately, which caused Will

to say with a laugh, "Why can't boys always stay little?"

Aunt Mary, Uncle Sam, and Mr. and Mrs. Lee came out to watch the game, and decided that they had certainly had "a rousing good time," as Will said they had.

And here for the present we leave them.

THE END.



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